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Platform Poetics and the Algorithmic Lyric: Digital Media, Multimodality and Participatory Authorship in Contemporary Anglophone Poetry

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Abstract

This research paper explores the transformation of contemporary Anglophone poetry within digital environments shaped by social media platforms, algorithmic systems, multimodal communication, participatory audiences, and generative artificial intelligence. It argues that digital poetry represents more than a technological method of distribution; rather, it signifies a fundamental transformation in the processes of poetic production, circulation, reception, and authorship. In the digital age, poems no longer exist only as printed textual objects but increasingly function as dynamic cultural events embedded within networks of interfaces, algorithms, readers, and technological infrastructures.

Through the theoretical concepts of platform poetics and the algorithmic lyric, this study examines how digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and AI-assisted creative environments influence poetic form, visibility, performance, and literary value. The concept of platform poetics is used to analyse how technological affordances, recommendation systems, engagement metrics, and platform economies shape the creation and circulation of poetry. The algorithmic lyric further investigates how contemporary poetic voices operate within environments where personal expression intersects with algorithmic visibility, quantified audiences, and digital attention economies.

The study highlights the increasing importance of multimodality in contemporary poetry, where written language interacts with visual design, typography, images, sound, music, video performance, and interactive features. It examines how digital platforms encourage new forms of poetic expression that challenge traditional boundaries between text and performance, author and audience, and publication and participation. Furthermore, the research investigates participatory authorship by exploring how readers contribute to the social life of poems through sharing, commenting, remixing, adapting, and circulating digital poetic works.

Keywords Platform Poetics; Algorithmic Lyric; Digital Poetry; Contemporary Anglophone Poetry; Social Media Poetry

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1. Introduction

Poetry has always developed alongside changing media environments, and each technological transformation has influenced the ways in which poetic language is created, transmitted, experienced, and preserved. From ancient oral traditions and manuscript cultures to the emergence of print publication, audio recordings, radio, television, personal computers, and contemporary digital networks, poetry has continuously adapted to new forms of communication. The history of poetry is therefore not separate from the history of media; rather, poetic practices have evolved through interactions with the material conditions, cultural structures, and technological systems that shape literary expression. Each medium introduces new possibilities for composition, circulation, audience engagement, and interpretation, while also transforming established assumptions about authorship, literary authority, and aesthetic value.

The transition from print-centred literary culture to digital environments represents one of the most significant shifts in the contemporary history of poetry. Traditional literary systems largely positioned the poem as a stable textual object contained within books, journals, and anthologies. Meaning was often explored through close reading of language, structure, imagery, rhythm, and historical context. Although these approaches remain essential, digital poetry requires broader analytical frameworks because contemporary poems increasingly exist within complex technological environments. A poem published on Instagram, performed through TikTok, uploaded on YouTube, circulated as a screenshot, transformed into a video, or developed with artificial intelligence assistance does not function solely as written language. Instead, it operates through a network of interfaces, algorithms, visual elements, sound, performance, audience interaction, and commercial systems.

Contemporary digital platforms have introduced a new literary ecology in which poetry becomes connected to technological infrastructures and participatory cultures. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube do not simply provide spaces for publishing poems; they actively influence how poems are designed, discovered, shared, and interpreted. The structure of digital feeds, recommendation systems, hashtags, engagement metrics, and audience responses affect the visibility and circulation of poetic works. As a result, the contemporary poem is shaped not only by the creative intentions of the poet but also by the technological conditions through which it reaches readers.

Within this environment, poetry increasingly functions as a cultural event rather than an isolated textual artefact. A digital poem may involve visual composition, typography, background imagery, voice, music, performance, comments, reposts, and community responses. The boundaries between poet and audience become more flexible as readers participate in extending the meaning and social life of poems through sharing, adaptation, discussion, and creative transformation. Digital platforms therefore encourage forms of participatory authorship in which literary meaning emerges through interactions among writers, readers, technologies, and online communities.

Furthermore, digital poetry reflects broader changes in cultural production and literary recognition. Traditional systems of literary evaluation relied heavily on publishers, editors, critics, universities, and established institutions. Digital platforms appear to expand access by allowing writers to reach audiences directly, including voices that may have previously remained outside traditional literary structures. However, this accessibility exists alongside new forms of algorithmic mediation, where visibility may depend on platform policies, engagement patterns, and commercial priorities. The digital literary environment therefore contains both opportunities for inclusion and challenges related to inequality, attention economies, and technological dependence.

The emergence of artificial intelligence further complicates contemporary understandings of poetic creativity and authorship. AI-assisted tools can contribute to brainstorming, editing, translation, experimentation, and the generation of poetic language. These developments raise important questions about originality, human creativity, artistic ownership, and the future relationship between writers and machines. Rather than viewing technology as replacing poetic creativity, contemporary digital poetry can be understood as developing within a broader ecosystem involving human imagination, computational tools, platforms, and audiences.

This research examines these transformations through the concepts of platform poetics and the algorithmic lyric. Platform poetics explores how digital infrastructures influence poetic form, circulation, reception, and value, while the algorithmic lyric investigates how poetic expression operates within environments shaped by recommendation systems and quantified visibility. Together, these concepts provide a framework for understanding how contemporary Anglophone poetry has moved beyond the boundaries of the printed page toward a dynamic, networked, and technologically mediated literary practice.

2. Platform Poetics and Digital Literary Culture

Platform poetics refers to the study of how digital infrastructures, technological systems, and online environments shape contemporary poetic practices. It examines poetry not only as a linguistic and aesthetic form but also as a cultural practice embedded within networks of platforms, algorithms, interfaces, audiences, and economic structures. In traditional literary studies, the poem is often analysed as an independent textual object; however, platform poetics argues that digital poetry must be understood through the technological environments in which it is created, circulated, and experienced.

Digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and online literary spaces do not merely function as neutral channels for publishing poetry. Instead, they actively influence how poems are composed, presented, discovered, shared, and interpreted. Features such as recommendation algorithms, hashtags, engagement metrics, visual layouts, video formats, and interactive tools shape the visibility and accessibility of poetic works. As a result, poets increasingly consider not only linguistic expression but also platform-specific conventions, audience expectations, and methods of digital circulation.

The concept of platform poetics highlights the relationship between writers, readers, interfaces, algorithms, and cultural economies. Poets use digital platforms creatively to experiment with new forms of expression, including visual poetry, audiovisual performances, interactive texts, and collaborative writing practices. At the same time, these creative possibilities exist alongside structural limitations created by platform environments, including algorithmic gatekeeping, commercial pressures, attention competition, and unequal access to digital visibility.

Therefore, platform poetics does not suggest that technology completely determines poetic practice. Rather, it explores the complex interaction between human creativity and technological systems, recognising that digital platforms simultaneously enable innovation and introduce new forms of mediation that influence contemporary poetic production and reception.

3. The Algorithmic Lyric

The algorithmic lyric represents a significant transformation in the relationship between poetic expression, technology, and contemporary systems of cultural circulation. It describes poetry that is created, distributed, encountered, and interpreted within algorithmically organised digital environments. Unlike traditional lyric poetry, which has often been understood as an intimate expression of an individual voice directed toward an imagined reader, the contemporary digital lyric exists within networks of platforms, recommendation systems, audience metrics, and technological infrastructures. The poetic voice now operates within a space where personal expression interacts with systems that measure attention, engagement, and visibility.

In digital environments, poets increasingly become aware that their work is encountered through algorithmic systems that determine discoverability and circulation. Views, likes, shares, comments, saves, and recommendations become indicators through which poems gain visibility and reach wider audiences. These measurements do not necessarily determine the artistic value of a poem; however, they influence how poets present their work, select themes, design visual elements, and engage with audiences. The algorithmic lyric therefore exists between creative intention and technological mediation.

The concept also highlights the changing nature of the poetic self. The traditional lyric “I” represented personal emotions, memories, experiences, and reflections. In digital spaces, this self becomes simultaneously individual and networked. A poet may express personal feelings while also considering audience reactions, platform conventions, and patterns of online engagement. The lyric voice becomes connected to communities, digital identities, and systems of visibility. Thus, the algorithmic lyric does not replace personal expression but reveals how contemporary poetic identity is shaped through interactions between human creativity and digital infrastructures.

4. Multimodality and Digital Poetic Form

Digital poetry expands beyond written language by incorporating multiple modes of communication, including typography, images, sound, voice, gesture, music, animation, video editing, and performance. Unlike traditional print poetry, where meaning is primarily constructed through linguistic elements such as words, rhythm, imagery, and structure, digital

poetry creates meaning through the interaction of several semiotic systems. The poem becomes a combination of verbal, visual, auditory, and performative elements.

Social media poetry demonstrates that visual presentation is not merely an additional decorative feature but an essential component of poetic meaning. Typography, spacing, colour, background images, handwriting styles, and visual arrangement influence how audiences interpret poetic messages. A short poem displayed on a carefully designed digital image may communicate intimacy, vulnerability, or emotional intensity through its visual form as much as through its words.

The rise of video-based platforms has further expanded the possibilities of poetic expression. Platforms such as TikTok and YouTube allow poets to combine written text with spoken performance, facial expression, body language, music, camera techniques, and editing. The poet's voice, tone, pauses, gestures, and physical presence become part of the poetic experience. In this context, performance is not separate from the poem but contributes directly to its meaning.

Multimodal digital poetry therefore challenges traditional approaches that focus only on textual analysis. Understanding contemporary poetry requires attention to the interaction between different modes and the ways in which technological environments shape interpretation. The digital poem is not simply a written work presented online; it is a complex composition where multiple forms of communication collaborate to produce meaning.

5. Participatory Authorship

Digital environments have transformed the relationship between poets and audiences by changing readers from passive recipients into active participants in literary production and circulation. In traditional literary models, authorship was often associated with individual creation, while readers primarily engaged with completed works through interpretation and criticism. Digital platforms complicate this distinction by allowing audiences to participate directly in the continuation and transformation of poetic works.

Readers on digital platforms share poems, create responses, translate texts, produce adaptations, perform verses, and reinterpret meanings within new social and cultural contexts. A poem may gain significance not only through the intention of its creator but also through the

ways communities adopt, circulate, and transform it. Comments, discussions, reposts, and creative responses become part of the poem's cultural life.

The concept of participatory authorship does not suggest that the poet loses creative ownership or responsibility. Instead, it recognises that contemporary poetic meaning develops through networks involving writers, readers, platforms, and communities. The poem becomes an evolving cultural object whose interpretation and influence continue beyond its original publication.

Digital participation also enables previously marginalised voices to reach wider audiences. Writers from diverse cultural, social, and geographical backgrounds can use online platforms to share experiences related to identity, migration, gender, race, memory, and social justice. However, participation remains shaped by algorithmic systems and unequal access to digital resources. Therefore, participatory authorship involves both expanded opportunities and new forms of technological mediation.

6. Artificial Intelligence and Poetic Creativity

The emergence of generative artificial intelligence introduces new debates regarding creativity, originality, authorship, and the future of literary production. AI systems can assist poets in generating ideas, experimenting with language, revising drafts, translating texts, exploring different styles, and developing creative possibilities. These technologies have created new forms of interaction between human writers and computational systems.

However, AI-assisted poetry also raises important questions about the nature of artistic creativity. Traditional concepts of authorship often emphasise individual imagination, personal experience, emotional depth, and intentional expression. AI-generated texts challenge these assumptions by demonstrating that language production can involve non-human systems capable of producing complex patterns and poetic structures.

Nevertheless, poetic creativity involves more than producing words. Human writers contribute cultural knowledge, emotional understanding, ethical awareness, personal experience, and critical judgement. The role of the poet remains important in selecting, modifying, interpreting, and contextualising AI-generated material. Therefore, AI should be understood not simply as

a replacement for human creativity but as part of a broader ecology of human-machine collaboration.

The integration of AI into digital poetry further expands the concept of platform poetics. A poem may now involve multiple stages of technological mediation: AI-assisted creation, digital design, platform distribution, algorithmic recommendation, and audience participation. This complex process requires new approaches to understanding authorship and literary value.

7. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and interdisciplinary research approach combining literary analysis with concepts from digital humanities, platform studies, multimodality theory, reader-response theory, and contemporary media studies. Since digital poetry exists across multiple formats and environments, the research methodology integrates several analytical methods to examine both textual features and technological contexts.

Close reading is used to analyse poetic language, including imagery, metaphor, rhythm, voice, themes, and structure. This traditional literary method is combined with multimodal analysis to examine how typography, images, sound, performance, visual design, and digital interfaces contribute to poetic meaning.

Platform analysis is employed to investigate how digital environments influence poetic production and circulation. The study examines features such as recommendation systems, hashtags, engagement metrics, sharing mechanisms, video formats, and audience interaction. Digital ethnographic observation is used to understand online poetic communities and patterns of participation.

The research corpus includes contemporary digital poems, social media poetry, audiovisual performances, online literary works, and AI-assisted poetic experiments from Anglophone contexts. The study focuses on how these works demonstrate changing relationships between technology, creativity, authorship, and audience engagement.

8. Conclusion

Contemporary poetry in the digital age cannot be fully understood through traditional text-centred approaches alone. The emergence of digital platforms, algorithmic systems,

participatory audiences, and artificial intelligence has transformed the conditions through which poetry is created, circulated, interpreted, and valued.

Platform poetics provides a framework for analysing these transformations by examining the relationship between literary creativity and technological infrastructures. It demonstrates that digital platforms are not passive spaces of publication but active environments that influence poetic form, visibility, and reception.

The algorithmic lyric reveals how contemporary poetic voices exist between personal expression and networked visibility, while multimodal analysis demonstrates that digital poems communicate through combinations of language, image, sound, and performance. Participatory authorship highlights the expanding role of audiences in shaping the social meaning of poetry, and AI-assisted creativity introduces new possibilities for collaboration between humans and machines.

Ultimately, contemporary Anglophone poetry represents an evolving literary practice shaped by technological change. Rather than replacing traditional poetic values, digital environments expand the possibilities of poetic creation and require new critical frameworks capable of understanding literature within increasingly complex human, technological, and cultural networks.

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